

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 04179 250557Z
ACTION SS-25

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INFO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
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S E C R E T BEIRUT 4179

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SOPN, SY, LE
SUBJECT: SYRIAN POLICY IN LEBANON

REF: (A) DAMASCUS 4198, (B) BEIRUT 4142

1. SYRIAN PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN AGAINST LEBANESE MILITIAS REPORT-
ED IN DAMASCUS 4198 AND WHICH HAS BEEN GOING ON FOR SOME DAYS IS
GIVING CONCERN TO GOL AS WELL AS TO US. BBC THIS MORNING REPORTS
CONTINUING SYRIAN PROPAGANDA ATTACKS IN WAKE OF THREE NIGHTS OF
SHELLING OF TOWN OF HADATH OVER THE WEEKEND. AS DAMASCUS NOTES,
PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN SEEMS DESIGNED PREPARE PUBLIC OPINION FOR
MILITARY ATTACKS. IMPLICATION IS THAT ATTACKS HAVE BEEN DECIDED
ON AND ARE TO BE LAUNCHED WHETHER OR NOT THERE ARE PROVOCATIONS.
PERHAPS SYRIANS FEEL THEY HAVE ALREADY ACCUMULATED ENOUGH PRO-
VOCATIONS TO JUSTIFY ATTACKS AT ANY POINT.

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2. (AS NOTED IN OUR REFTTEL AND ELSEWHERE, THERE APPARENTLY HAVE
BEEN CONTINUED PROVOCATIONS OF SYRIANS BY CHRISTIAN MILITIAS OVER
PAST WEEKS AND MOSLEM SOURCES REPORT REGULAR INFLOW OF SYRIAN
SOLDIERS KILLED OR INJURED AT BARBIR HOSPITAL. I PASSED THIS IN-
STITUTION MYSELF AT 0930 LOCAL ON JULY 24 AND SAW SYRIAN AMBULANCE
CARRYING AND UNLOADING APPARENTLY WOUNDED SYRIAN SOLDIER. WHETHER

HE WAS WOUNDED IN FIGHTING AROUND HADATH, OR SNIPED AT ELSEWHERE OR SHOT HIMSELF IN THE FOOT WHILE ON GUARD DUTY, I DO NOT KNOW. HE WAS WEARING THE REDDISH CAMOUFLAGE FATIGUES OF THE SYRIAN COMMANDO FORCES.

3. SYRIANS ARE ALSO ROUNDING UP KATAEB AND PNL MEMBERS IN CERTAIN AREAS IN NORTHERN LEBANON AND HAVE RAISED FEARS THEY ARE EMBARKED ON A CONCERTED CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS ACROSS THE BOARD. THE SHELLING OF HADATH, WHICH WAS OUT OF SCALE TO THE ALLEGED PROVOCATION (WHICH MAY NOT EVEN HAVE OCCURRED) MAY BE A PHASE IN THE CAMPAIGN, OR IT MAY HAVE BEEN DUE TO INDISCIPLINE. HADATH IS AN NLP STRONGHOLD AND WAS ONE OF THE MORE MILITANT SUBURBS DURING THE TWO-YEAR WAR. A LOOK AT THE MAP WILL SHOW IT IS PART OF THE RING OF CHRISTIAN VILLAGES WHICH ALMOST ENCIRCLE BEIRUT FROM THE SOUTH. IT ALSO CONTROLS ONE OF THE ALTERNATE ROUTES FROM WEST BEIRUT UP TO BAABDA AND THE DAMASCUS ROAD. ACCORDING TO JOHNNY ABDO, THE SYRIANS CONSIDER THE TOWN OF HADATH AS HAVING "FALLEN" BECAUSE THEY HAVE BEEN SURROUNDED AND ALL ENTRANCES ARE SEALED. THEIR PURPOSE MAY BE TO ISOLATE AND INTIMIDATE THIS CHRISTIAN STRONGPOINT TO PREVENT ITS SUPPORTING THE PHALANGE AND NLP IN BEIRUT IN THE EVENT OF A GENERALIZED ATTACK ON THAT FRONT, OR IT MAY SIMPLY BE PUNITIVE.

4. WHEN I TALKED TO PRESIDENT SARKIS YESTERDAY AFTERNOON ON THE TELEPHONE I FOUND HIM RATHER DEPRESSED AND THE PRESS THIS MORNING REPORTS THAT A CONTINUATION OF THE FIGHTING MAY LEAD HIM TO CON-
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SIDER RESIGNING AGAIN. WE ARE IN NO POSITION TO READ SYRIAN INTENTIONS, BUT THEY SEEM TO BE FOLLOWING A CONCERTED PLAN TO FORCE SETTLEMENT ON THEIR TERMS. JUST WHAT THOSE TERMS ARE AND WHAT EXPECT FROM THE PHALANGE AND THE PNL IS NOT CLEAR, BUT IT SEEMS THAT IN PURSUING THEIR POLICY, WHATEVER IT MAY BE, THEY HAVE LITTLE RESPECT FOR PRESIDENT SARKIS AND THAT THEY DO NOT CARE WHETHER HE STAYS IN OFFICE OR NOT, OR WHETHER THEIR SHELLING BREAKS WINDOWS IN HIS PALACE.

5. NOW THAT SARKIS HAS WITHDRAWN HIS RESIGNATION IT HAS BECOME POSSIBLE FOR PEOPLE TO SAY, "IF HE HAD RESIGNED, A WAY WOULD HAVE BEEN FOUND TO ELECT ANOTHER PRESIDENT." THEY MAY WELL BE RIGHT, BUT IF SOMEONE ELSE COMES TO POWER HE OBVIOUSLY WILL BE THE SYRIAN'S MAN. IF ONE HAD MORE CONFIDENCE IN SYRIAN INTELLIGENCE AND SKILL, ONE COULD PERHAPS VISUALIZE THIS WITHOUT TOO MUCH CONCERN. IT IS POSSIBLE THEY WOULD PICK SOMEBODY DECENT WHOSE CREDENTIALS WOULD ENABLE HIM TO SAVE LEBANON FROM ITS PRESENT DILEMMA. I FEAR, HOWEVER, THAT THEY ARE GOING TO BOTCH IT AS THEY HAVE BOTCHED EVERYTHING ELSE THEY HAVE TOUCHED IN THIS COUNTRY.
PARKER

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